

Bringing Culture to Life : How to work the film 500 Days Of Summer in class Part2

Título: Bringing Culture to Life : How to work the film 500 Days Of Summer in class Part2. **Target:** Bachillerato y Escuela Oficial de Idiomas. **Asignatura:** Inglés. **Autor:** Lucia Carel Aguilera, Licenciada en Filología, Jefa de Departamento de Lenguas Extranjeras.

4. CULTURE

The time has come to develop our students' cultural awareness. Actually this expression refers to the recognition that not all people are from the same cultural background. It also has to do with the fact of recognising that people have different values, different behaviours and different approaches in life. Therefore, I've decided to split this extensive section into five parts: fine arts, music, location, sports and cinema.

4.1. Fine Arts: Magritte and Hopper

Tom tells his sister that he and Summer are so compatible because she likes Magritte and Hopper likes him. Both happen to be famous painters so, this is a great opportunity for our learners to research a little bit about them. These are the expected answers:

Edward Hopper (1882-1967) was an American realist painter from New York. His success arrived in 1923 thanks to an exhibition of aquarelle (water colours) in 1924, which turned Hopper into a reference in Arts and a great painter of American scenes. His artworks often appear in American films and he has been considered the painter who reflected solitude the best. He painted rural and urban images, really important for realism and the viewers could understand the feelings of the characters painted on the canvas.

However, Magritte (1898-1967) was a Belgian artist who joined the surrealism movement together with Dalí and Miró. Magritte's work frequently displays a collection of ordinary objects in an unusual context, giving new meanings. The titles of his artworks are also an important part of the puzzle of his original claim. The painter plays constantly with reality and illusion.

Then, ten paintings have been selected and pupils have to write their author and title below them. Next to them, speech bubbles have been placed to be filled with what the student feels when he or she sees it. What's more, they are encouraged to follow their own instincts instead of exposing an expert's opinion.

For example, here are some answers I found out my own students' sheets:

1. Magritte's The Treachery of Images : "we must think about what we see because it isn't real. In the same way, what we don't see can be real too."

2. Hopper's Morning Sun: "the woman is thinking of her dead husband. She's looking for something that could replace him but she realises that she's completely alone,"

3. Magritte's The Lovers: "Forbidden love: different cultures, habits, fear of the future, but at the same time an expectation of freedom."

4.Hopper's Nighthawks: "The couple have killed a man. They're nervous but quiet at the same time: they're following a plan."

The other paintings are Magritte's The Son of Man, Big Family and the Night Owl; and Hopper's Hotel Room, Chop Suey and Gas.

Using art as a tool inside our teaching routine is excellent for thinking and expressing their own opinions freely. In fact, the linguistic researcher Shier suggests that "teachers must make a creative and deliberated effort to include art in the language learning curriculum. Integrated visual work contributes to the contextualisation of written work and encourages the development of critical thinking skills". Creativity is centrally important to education and bridges should be built across subjects.

4.2. Music:artists and songs from the soundtrack

According to the official website of the film soundtrack, "(500) Days of Summer is the feature film directorial debut from Marc Webb, a noted music video director who has lensed clips for such artists as Regina Spektor, My Chemical Romance, Weezer, and Green Day. So it's no surprise that pop music plays an important role in setting the tone in (500) Days of Summer. In keeping with the film's playfully unorthodox nature, the soundtrack features a host of offbeat artists, including Regina Spektor, Feist, Black Lips, Doves, Carla Bruni, and The Smiths. In a key moment in the film, Tom (played by Joseph Gordon-Levitt) is listening to the latter's song "There Is A Light That Never Goes Out" on his iPod, while riding in an elevator with Summer (played by Zooey Deschanel), who overhears it and comments that she loves The Smiths."

There is no doubt that music is another character of this story and the filmmaker has carefully chosen each track to fit perfectly with each scene.

One of the tasks of this part is to ask your students to investigate the artists compiled in this soundtrack and to summarise their achievements in three lines. For instance, Regina Spektor, the Smiths, She&Him, the Pixies, Doves, Simon and Garfunkel, Nancy Sinantra and Hall &Oates. Those artists belong to previous decades or to the independent pop music scene but they've got, in a way or another, an important influence in the American culture.

After doing this, they will look for the lyrics of the songs listened to during the film and find the relevance they've got for the plot: "Us" by Regina Spektor, "There is a light that never goes out"by the Smiths, "Here comes your man" by the Pixies, "Mushaboom" by Feist, "There goes fear" by the Doves, "Bookends by Simon & Garfunkel, "Sugar Town"by Nancy Sinatra and "You make my dreams" by Hall and Oates.

Finally, the last task of this section is about pop music of the sixties. Summer mentions that Ringo Starr is her favourite Beatles member and we can also see in a scene that she's got a portrait of him at home. But who were the Beatles? And Ringo Starr? Students are told to research about them in groups of four, some of them will know the group, other won't and the Beatles have an important role in Anglo-Saxon culture.

4.3. Location: Los Angeles

Architecture has been described as the star of the film. Tom is an architect and this gives a great opportunity to the director to show many places that aren't normally mentioned when films are located in Los Angeles. Buildings used include the Los Angeles Music Center and the Towers of California Plaza. The older Fine Arts Building is also featured in the film, in a scene where Tom shows it to Summer and mention its designers, Walker and Eisner.

Students are told to look for the location of the city in the United States (it looks pretty basic but you'll be surprised to know that most of them don't know much about international geography!), its population and the most important places to visit in a writing of one hundred words approximately. We're trying to practice descriptions here: The California Plaza, Los Angeles Music Center, the Fine Arts Building and the Bradbury Building will be depicted in twenty words each. Give some output like:

Location: "Only ten minutes from where... /very close to .../in the town centre.../on the south coast of... /opposite /next to .../near .. /is situated /is located..."

Comparative and superlative: "the best place... /the most popular... /the most interesting... /not as... as..."

Adjectives: "Huge / tiny / modern
/traditional/peaceful/busy/crowded/interesting/historical/ancient/breathtaking/bare/peaceful/crowded

Nouns: "design/ architecture/ history /facilities/ buildings/viewpoint..."

Useful phrases and expressions: "The area around ... has got (a) beautiful (sights/mountains/landscape...)

People can enjoy..."

4.4. Cinema: The Graduate

At the beginning of the film, the narrator tells how Tom was influenced by the film *The Graduate* and just before breaking up, Summer and Tom watch it at the cinema and she is moved to tears. Students will have to find information about this feature (year, actors, plot, etc.) and to explain why it is so important to Tom and then to Summer.

The film tells how the recent college graduate Benjamin Braddock is trapped into an affair with Mrs. Robinson, who happens to be the wife of his father's business partner and then finds himself falling in love with her daughter, Elaine.

Actually, Tom's misreading of the movie is that the ending is happy, since Dustin Hoffman and Katharine Ross end up running away with one another, and are caught up in the excitement of it all on the bus. But Summer cries because the movie actually has a bittersweet ending, as both characters sit on the back of the bus, and realize they face an uncertain future and the consequences of their actions in real life. ●

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